(b) if so, whether it is a fact that inspite of this, the Ministry of Commerce has not formed and exclusive Agri-Export-Zone (AEZ) for tobacco in Andhra Pradesh, which is the tobacco capital of the country; and

(c) if so, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) Yes, Sir. The exports of tobacco and tobacco products during 2004-05 has been an all time high at Rs. 1362.18 crores.

(b) and (c) In view of steady growth of tobacco production and export every year, the need for forming an exclusive Agri-Export-Zone for tobacco has not been felt necessary.

Steps to develop tobacco exports

747. SHRI V. HANUMANTHA RAO: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government proposes to set up an Inter-Ministerial Task Force to coordinate and help develop tobacco exports;

(b) whether it is a fact that foreign imports are damaging Indian farmers;

(c) whether Government has initiated any steps to ensure that Indian farmers are not damaged by foreign imports;

(d) what are the reasons for Government dealing with the problem in a very slow manner; and

(e) the steps proposed to ensure that Indian tobacco is not exposed to unfair competition from foreign products in this area?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) No, Sir.

(b) The increased domestic production of FCV tobacco year after year and its marketing at prices well above the Minimum Suport Price (MSP) fixed by the Government suggests that foreign imports have not caused any damage to Indian tobacco farmers.

(c) to (e) The Tobacco Board is implementing several extension and developmental progammes such as model project areas, integrated pest management etc. to enhance the quality and production of tobacco to meet the changing international demands. These measures are directed at improving yields, quality, and remunerative prices for farmers. The concerns of international customers are adressed in a focussed manner to train and educate growers to meet global standards.